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WORKING TOGETHER FOR RURAL AMERICA: 2000 AND BEYOND



PART A— INTEGRATING NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND RURAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE
USDA FOREST SERVICE
ECONOMIC ACTION PROGRAMS

SEPTEMBER 2000
FS-681

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USDA FOREST SERVICE ECONOMIC ACTION PROGRAMS

Economic Action Programs (EAP's) help rural communities and businesses dependent on natural resources become sustainable and self-sufficient.

- ▶ *Rural Community Assistance Programs* help rural communities build skills, networks, and strategies to address social, environmental, and economic changes.
- ▶ The *Forest Products Conservation and Recycling Program* helps communities and businesses find new and expanded business opportunities based on forest resources.
- ▶ The *Market Development and Expansion Program* helps develop new markets for natural-resource-based goods and services.

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A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE
USDA FOREST SERVICE
ECONOMIC ACTION PROGRAMS

PREPARED BY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
COOPERATIVE FORESTRY,
RURAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

SEPTEMBER 2000

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/eap.html>

"Who is the land? We are, but no less the meanest flower that blows. Land ecology at the outset discards the fallacious notion that the wild community is one thing, the human community another."

— A. Leopold, 1942

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"The word 'community' brings to mind a particular place and the people familiar with it. But in an era where the frontiers of science continue to expose unforeseen inherent connections, where distance is a state of mind, and satellite news solicits our participation in dramas a world away, it is possible that even our abstractions need expanding.

Community, like water, is a requisite of life on Earth. Our forefathers appear to have been more conscious of that truth than the average twentieth-century American, but we are re-learning it. A frightful gridlock of shortages, conflicts, priorities and injunctions is forcing us to the realization that we must take part in community or perish.

...Reflect on community's many facets, and...be reminded that biologically, geographically, historically, politically, philosophically, and interpersonally, we are always linked to someone—or something—other."

— "Dialogue" Vol.4, No.2 (New Mexico Water Dialogue) – 1995

ECONOMIC ACTION PROGRAMS

VISION

Vital rural communities are able to achieve their desired level of sustainability as part of healthy ecosystems.

Vital rural communities have the capacity to use, sustain, and renew the resources and skills they need to thrive over time and to become the kinds of communities their residents want them to be.

STRATEGIC PURPOSE

Develop and enhance rural community vitality, resiliency, and economic opportunities within a sustainable natural resource framework. This requires support from the entire Forest Service (specifically, National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and Research and Development), rural communities, other Federal and State agencies, and diverse groups willing to work together.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS

An increased number of vital rural communities are able to exercise effective civic capacity and community resiliency in the face of ongoing change, as indicated by—

- ▶ Increased use of the skills, knowledge, and abilities of local people
- ▶ Strengthened relationships and communication
- ▶ Improved community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability
- ▶ Developed appropriately diverse and healthy economies, including increased family-wage jobs and locally owned businesses
- ▶ Sustained healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits

APPROACH

The Forest Service Economic Action Programs (EAP's) approaches are facilitative, catalytic, community based, inclusive, collaborative, capacity building, flexible, measurable, and accountable.

DESIRED OUTCOMES OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

- I. Rural Communities With Capacity To Manage Change
- II. Sustainable Resource Management via Collaborative Stewardship
- III. Appropriately Diverse Economies
- IV. Effective Forest Service Institutional Infrastructure
- V. Effective Communication and Outreach



INTRODUCTION

The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service has always been committed to strengthening rural America. Today, more than ever, we are committed to working in partnership with others, in the public and private sectors, who are trying to facilitate locally led changes that benefit both the land and rural communities. Our efforts reach across the country. However, we emphasize our efforts on locations near national forests and grasslands because our management decisions have a direct impact on rural communities that are within and near National Forest System lands.

Since 1990, the overall goal of the Forest Service's rural community assistance efforts has been to facilitate and foster sustainable rural community development by linking community assistance efforts with natural resource management. Assistance to rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses focuses on the themes of:

- ▶ **healthy communities**
- ▶ **appropriately diverse economies**
- ▶ **sustainable ecosystems**

The Forest Service provides direct assistance to rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses to help build local capacity, to stimulate appropriate diversification of local economies, and to expand markets for local products. We engage local communities in collaborative planning and natural resource stewardship and help provide for a sustainable future through research, technology development, and technology transfer.

BENEFITS OF A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH

Forest Service Benefits:

- ▶ Collaborative planning, management, and stewardship activities—including the development and use of new technologies—establish healthy watersheds and fire-safe communities.
- ▶ Integrating ecological restoration with rural community sustainability improves public and private forests and grasslands.
- ▶ Community capacity building and empowerment enable grassroots partnerships, increase volunteerism and other efforts to contribute “for the good of the whole,” and mobilize community knowledge and resources.

Key Facts

The Nation has about 1.6 billion acres of forests and rangelands, under all ownerships.

The Forest Service manages 139.9 million acres of Federal forest lands.

Non-Federal owners and managers deal with 487.5 million acres of forest lands.



Key Facts

County and municipal owners and managers deal with 10.5 million acres of forest lands.

As of the 1990 census, there are more than 13,400 "places" that are outside metro areas in the United States.



- ▶ Informed and engaged rural communities contribute to protecting and enhancing working forests and grasslands, increase the understanding of the need to reduce fragmentation of habitat, and work toward conserving and extending natural resources.
- ▶ Deliberately engaging both newcomers and existing rural residents in dialogue with the agency enhances knowledgeable participation in public decisionmaking that gets beyond natural resource conflicts.
- ▶ Taking into account natural, cultural, and historical resources as part of an integrated development strategy results in fewer conflicts and more sustainable solutions.
- ▶ New community partnerships make better use of services and programs by increasing coordination, leveraging limited funds, and broadening political support.
- ▶ The participatory approach increases internal and external buy-in, pools limited resources, increases agency credibility, improves plans, and promotes goodwill.
- ▶ A community-based approach reduces conflicts between national mandates and local needs.
- ▶ The Forest Service demonstrates its ability to help rural communities meet their economic and social objectives within environmental parameters.
- ▶ Engagement—from the planning process through project design—of skilled workers, successful locally owned businesses, new and diverse markets, and supportive publics in ecosystem restoration and enhancement maintains and enhances a "stewardship infrastructure" in rural communities associated with national forests and grasslands.

Rural Community Benefits:

- ▶ Through involvement in national forest or grassland management and policy, the community may identify and realize the potential economic opportunities offered by the proximity of National Forest System lands. Involvement is increasingly important as relationships change between the Forest Service and rural communities.
- ▶ Community involvement may result in empowerment, pride, and motivation to begin or continue taking steps to improve local economic and social conditions as desired.
- ▶ Changes in national forest management and policy may provide economic opportunities to local communities.

- ▶ Communities that have a good relationship with the Forest Service and are involved in national forest and grassland management and planning may learn about available support and lessen feelings of intimidation.
- ▶ Community involvement in forest and grassland management and planning will lead to a better understanding of national forests and grasslands and the Forest Service.
- ▶ Community involvement may result in a positive atmosphere in the community with a reduction in the number of anti-Government factions and less of a sense of “us vs. them.”

BACKGROUND, PROGRESS, AND CHALLENGES

An effort to change how the Forest Service works with rural communities was outlined in *A Strategic Plan for the 90's: Working Together for Rural America* (June 1990). A companion strategy, *The Forest Products Conservation and Recycling National Strategy*, was released in January 1992. These two plans are being updated and combined in this strategic plan.

The national strategic plans have served as an umbrella under which a variety of programs, methodologies, and partnerships have worked together toward new and improved ways of assisting rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses. The plans have guided progress toward goals in a dynamic way—as learning increased within the Forest Service, as conditions in rural America changed, as new or different challenges surfaced, and as the interest in collaborative, integrative efforts grew.

In the 1997 publication *Taking the Pulse: Revisiting Working Together for Rural America*, the Forest Service took a look at the progress made in implementing the 1990 strategic plan for rural community development. *Taking the Pulse* also considered the challenges still facing the agency as it works toward achieving its long-term outcomes of healthy ecosystems, vital communities, and effective organization.

The 1997 progress review indicated that although the Forest Service has made significant advances since 1990, many challenges remain in achieving substantive internal coordination, greater cooperation with other public and private entities, and effective integration with community-based activities.

Key Facts

More than 13,700 of the non-metro places have populations of fewer than 2,500 people. This adds up to more than 13,100,000 people living in places with populations smaller than 2,500.

Forested watersheds are primary sources of drinking water for rural and urban communities.



Key Facts

Seventy-two percent of all U. S. counties are rural counties.

About 54 million people in the United States are "non-metropolitan" (as measured in 1996).

During the 1990's, more than 75 percent of rural counties experienced substantial population growth and related changes. However, declining population was still a characteristic of areas dependent on farming.



STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE — PROCESS SUMMARY

A series of 11 multi-State workshops and 1 consolidation workshop were conducted from September 1998 through April 1999. The workshops were conducted to gather information and learn from the experience of knowledgeable people who will live with the consequences of an updated and expanded strategy—either as implementers, beneficiaries, or collaborators.

The action research workshops collected information directly from people who know and care about rural communities, collaborative stewardship, economic diversification, forest products and technology, sustainable forest management, special forest products, National Forest System lands, State and local government, and many other topics.

The question used to guide the action research workshops was: "What should be the USDA Forest Service role in community-based natural resource use/management, socio-economic, and ecological processes in the year 2005?" The process included consideration of the interactions of the Forest Service with State foresters; other Federal, State, and local agencies; and other partner organizations. Coordination occurred throughout the process with the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), Committee on Forest-Based Economic Assistance. This committee is responsible for a parallel, interconnected NASF strategy, the *Forest-Based Economic Assistance Initiative*, which speaks to the role of State foresters (see sidebar).

The consolidation workshop used a subgroup of participants from all the previous workshops to analyze the data and compile a report on the situation of rural America and the potential for Forest Service efforts to achieve the long-term vision of "vital rural communities as part of healthy ecosystems." A "Consolidation Workshop Report" was compiled to document the information results of the workshops. The report provided the primary source of data for the development of the new strategic plan. Other significant reports and background information have also been used. Examples include:

- ▶ The USDA-chartered Committee of Scientists (COS) report, *Sustaining the People's Lands – Recommendations for Stewardship of the National Forests and Grasslands into the Next Century* (COS 1999)
- ▶ The agency's Natural Resource Agenda, *Charting Our Future...A Nation's Natural Resource Legacy*, FS-630 (USDA Forest Service 1998)
- ▶ NASF Economic Action Program – *Review of the USFS Economic Action Program Components* (NASF FBEA Committee 1998)
- ▶ *Rural Development and Community-Based Forest Planning and Management: A New, Collaborative Paradigm* (Frentz, Burns, Voth, & Sperry 1999)
- ▶ *Measuring Community Success and Sustainability: An Interactive Workbook* (North Central Regional Center for Rural Development 1999 revision)

Key Facts

Large portions of western watersheds, communities, and rural homes are at risk of being destroyed by wildfire because they are surrounded by overgrown forests.

Two of every three rural counties are highly dependent on natural-resource-based earnings.



Key Facts

Many forest-dependent rural communities have lost natural-resource-based economic activity.

Some of the most serious economic distress and much of the deepest poverty in the United States occur in rural communities surrounded by magnificent forests and grasslands.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS (NASF)

FOREST-BASED ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE INITIATIVE

Community Economic Development

Provide technical assistance and matching funds for locally initiated and planned projects designed to stimulate improvements in the economic or social well-being of rural communities through sustainable use and retention of forest resources. Assistance is aligned with the Forest Service Rural Development (RD) program component.

Technology Transfer

Encourage and facilitate the wise, more efficient use of forest resources to enhance economic development and stimulate better forest land stewardship. Technology transfer is aligned with the Forest Service Forest Products Conservation & Recycling (FPC&R) program component.

Marketing

Focus on expanding domestic and international markets for forest products through information assessment, identification of income-producing opportunities, actions to achieve market acceptance, and development of marketing strategies. Marketing is aligned with Forest Service efforts to expand programmatic work in the marketing arena for both RD and FPC&R.

Demonstration and Product Development

Increase value-added forest product processing, reduce the environmental impact of harvesting and processing forest products, improve utilization of wood wastes and residues, and extend the useful life of forest products. This element of the initiative is aligned with RD, FPC&R, and the Wood in Transportation (WIT) programs.

PARTS TO THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

This new strategic plan—*Working Together for Rural America: 2000 and Beyond*—is composed of three parts:

Part A: Integrating Natural Resource Management and Rural Community Assistance consists of a strategic plan for the USDA Forest Service EAP's and key appendices. Hardcopy and electronic versions of this document are available.

Part B: Implementation Plan is a detailed and dynamic document, meant to be updated and modified annually to show progress with activities and to include new ideas and actions for achieving the goals of the strategic plan. Part B: The Implementation Plan is maintained primarily as a set of electronic action plans accessible via the Internet.

Part C: Background and Source Material consists of reports, technical material, and other data maintained in hardcopy form for reference purposes but not available for mass distribution.

This document, *Part A: Integrating Natural Resource Management and Rural Community Assistance*, includes the following sections:

- ▶ The Forest Service's outcomes and goals for work with rural communities
- ▶ An overview of the Implementation Plan and process
- ▶ A summary of the issues and opportunities developed at the consolidation workshop, which formed the basis for the outcomes and goals
- ▶ A look at future challenges and program potential
- ▶ Selected references
- ▶ Appendices with supplemental information, such as a discussion of the past, present, and future context for this work (including key findings from the workshops) and information on how the action plans were developed

Key Facts

Of about 2,200 rural counties, 500 are classified as being in persistent poverty; 1,500 are under severe growth stress; and 1,300 are within 100 miles of a national forest boundary, are dependent on natural resources, and have the potential to be adversely affected by land management decisions.

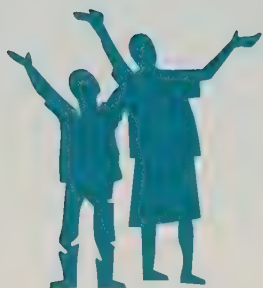


OUTCOMES AND GOALS

Key Facts

Finding profitable uses for small trees or currently unmerchantable woody material provides jobs and builds locally owned businesses in rural communities.

The natural-resource-based industrial infrastructure has declined or disappeared in many areas of the West.



A hierarchy of outcomes and goals has emerged from the experience of implementing the earlier strategic plans and the information generated by the action research workshops:

- ▶ Long-range, higher order outcomes and goals speak to the needs and opportunities of rural communities and the biophysical ecosystems.
- ▶ Other long-range outcomes and goals are necessary to institute or continue organizational change within the Forest Service and other institutions that supply resources or authorities necessary to achieve the higher order goals.

The following outcomes and goals represent both levels—to help the agency envision what is possible to achieve in the future of rural America, as well as to set our sights on what it will take for the agency and our partners to achieve that vision.

The issues and opportunities identified during the national workshops, from which the outcomes and goals were derived, are presented later in this document.

OUTCOME I

RURAL COMMUNITIES WITH CAPACITY TO MANAGE CHANGE

Goals

- A. The Forest Service national strategic plan for EAP's provides unique, flexible financial and technical support that helps natural-resource-based businesses and rural communities to build capacity.
- B. Rural communities plan with an understanding of sustainable forest and grassland management and have the capacity to increase natural-resource-based and other sustainable community development opportunities.
- C. Rural community strategic planning and Forest Service land management planning are coordinated to integrate and achieve the goals of each.

- D. Leadership training, data sharing, educational programs, and other capacity-building efforts are provided for community leaders, development specialists, State and local government officials, and business/industry leaders.
- E. The Forest Service works with communities and other partners toward improving the ability of rural communities to develop sustainable natural-resource-based strategies and to improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas.

OUTCOME II

SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT VIA COLLABORATIVE STEWARDSHIP

Goals

- A. The Forest Service (specifically, the National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and Research and Development areas) is fully committed to community-based approaches and methods as an integral component for achieving ecosystem health and rural community vitality.
- B. Forest Service managers include rural community assistance considerations in agency resource decisions in order to more effectively assist rural communities and the Nation to achieve goals for sustainable development and improved quality of life.

OUTCOME III

APPROPRIATELY DIVERSE ECONOMIES

Goals

- A. The Forest Service helps natural-resource-based businesses and rural communities to integrate use of natural resources in the improvement of local economies through providing products; processing of raw or value-added materials; marketing; recreation and tourism planning and development; and providing research and development, technology transfer, and other relevant methods.

Key Facts

Timber is the highest valued crop in 8 Southern States and ranks among the top 3 agricultural crops in all of the 13 Southern States.

Forest industries rank among the top three manufacturing industries in each of the Southern States.



Key Facts

During the 1990's, southern forests have become more strategically important for the Nation's supply of forest products. Projections indicate this will continue well into the new century.

The promise of markets for southern forest products in the future presents a significant economic opportunity, which is counterbalanced by the high concentration of persistent poverty and low community capacity in many rural places surrounded by forests.



- B. In cooperation with other agencies and the private sector, the Forest Service provides assistance to rural communities affected by changing natural resource management and policies on National Forest System lands. Such assistance enables rural communities dependent on National Forest System natural resources to build capacity, upgrade existing industries, and diversify, including the development of new economic activity in nonforest-related industries.

OUTCOME IV

EFFECTIVE FOREST SERVICE INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Goals

- A. In its rural community assistance efforts, the Forest Service collaborates and forms partnerships with other Federal, State, and local organizations to effectively accomplish community goals.
- B. This Forest Service strategic plan and associated programs are well understood and used within the agency for integrating natural resource management and sustainable forest and grassland management with sustainable rural community development.
- C. The development of the program of work on national forests and grasslands fully involves local communities and integrates sustainable community development efforts into the implementation of the work on public lands.
- D. The Forest Service has knowledgeable, well-trained employees assigned to provide coordination and assistance based on community needs and workload.
- E. Implementation of the national strategic plan for EAP's is appropriately decentralized, with effective program management tools at all levels and continued flexibility to meet the diverse needs of rural communities across the country.
- F. Funding for implementing the national strategic plan for EAP's is linked to accountability measures related to outcomes that are of value to rural communities.

- G. The Forest Service supports collaborative research and demonstration projects with communities, nongovernmental organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and similar organizations.
- H. Social and economic considerations, as well as environmental data, are an integral part of inclusive dialogue and final decision processes, both within the Forest Service and in rural communities.
- I. Forest Service procedures and legal instruments (for example, contracts and cooperative agreements) are supportive of collaborative stewardship, which results in real change in how agency work gets done.

OUTCOME V

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

Goals

- A. This national strategic plan for EAP's and related programs are well understood and used by rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses.
- B. Key stakeholders and political decisionmakers recognize and value the results of the Forest Service national strategic plan efforts to integrate natural resource management and rural community development.
- C. Formerly underserved and distressed rural communities are fully informed and involved with the Forest Service and/or its delivery partners in efforts to integrate natural resource management and rural community development.
- D. Forest Service employees at all levels of the organization understand and integrate the needs of culturally, geographically, and economically diverse communities in agency planning and management activities.
- E. This national strategic plan for EAP's is understood, used, and supported at the State and Federal levels in both the executive and legislative branches.

Key Facts

The South has the highest percentage of "working poor" in the United States, at least partially because of the lower wages that characterize southern employment.

All nonmetro minority counties show a disproportionate degree of economic disadvantage compared to other nonmetro counties. The economic disadvantage tends to be more pronounced in counties where a minority group constitutes the largest proportion of the population.



Key Facts

Blacks, American Indians, or Hispanics make up one-third or more of the population in 333 nonmetro counties, which tend to be clustered geographically by racial and ethnic groups.

Poverty rates among rural minorities in the mid- to late-1990's were nearly three times higher than those of rural whites and substantially higher than those of urban minorities; poverty rates were the highest in the rural South and West.

- F. This national strategic plan for EAP's and related implementation efforts (such as technical assistance, programs, and others) is appropriately funded to provide unique and flexible financial and technical support. This support is sufficient to build community capacity to identify issues and solve problems in response to locally developed plans.



PLAN IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

The strategic planning process does not end with establishing long-range outcomes and goals. To implement the strategic plan, specific action plans have been designed to address multiple outcomes and goals in an integrated approach. The action plans are intended to leverage available resources and make progress toward long-term goals by cutting across the different categories of outcomes, thereby integrating efforts at various levels. The action plans collectively make up the Implementation Plan.

Most of the action plans were developed at the consolidation workshop but have been updated and edited to go with this strategic plan. The action plans are intended to be dynamic and timely tools; they are contained in a separate document and maintained on a website for easy access.

This section provides a brief overview of the action plans contained in the Implementation Plan. The complete Implementation Plan includes the statements and their related actions, activities, outcomes, and due dates. The Implementation Plan will be updated annually to show progress and to include new ideas and actions for achieving the outcomes and goals of the strategic plan. Updates will be posted to the website.

For the complete Implementation Plan, go to the following website address: <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/eap.html>

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ACTION STATEMENTS

1. Research and Technology Transfer

By providing products, processing, marketing, research, development, and technology transfer, the EAP's help communities to better use their natural resources to improve local economies.

2. Internal Support

EAP's are institutionalized and integrated into USDA, the National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and Research and Development policy and procedures. The National Forest System is fully committed to EAP's.

3. Program Management and Accountability

The Forest Service and its program delivery system can effectively manage EAP's, provide accountability for the agency, and provide information and support to communities, partners, employees, and others.

Key Facts

Employment growth in non-metro counties has slowed since 1995. For example, for those counties associated with Federal lands, annual employment growth has fallen from 3.1 percent (1991–1995) to 1.8 percent (1995–1998) annually. Employment growth in metro areas has been increasing over the same time period.



Key Facts

As the Nation's largest forest and rangeland manager—with an extensive and diverse employee base that resides in and contributes to rural communities—the Forest Service has a unique and different role compared to other entities that provide rural community assistance.

The health of rural communities and the health of forests and rangelands are inextricably interconnected.



4. External Support and Education/Information Sharing

EAP's are understood and used in communities and at State, Federal, and local levels. As a result, communities are able to plan with an understanding of sustainable forest management. Key stakeholders and political decisionmakers are committed financially and philosophically to long-term support of EAP's.

5. Reaching Previously Underserved Communities

Distressed and formerly underserved communities are fully informed and involved in EAP's.

6. Collaboration and Partnership

EAP's use collaboration, coordination, and partnerships to effectively accomplish community goals.

7. Training and Education

EAP's increase leadership training and educational programs provided to community leaders, development specialists, State and local government officials, and industry leaders to improve their capacity to develop sustainable natural-resource-based strategies and improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Critical issues and key opportunities were developed at the consolidation workshop. These issues and opportunities formed the basis for the outcomes and goals discussed earlier. For more information on the workshop findings, Forest Service regional offices maintain copies of the consolidation workshop report (Alvarez and Diemer 1999).

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE OF RURAL AMERICA AND THE FOREST SERVICE

Based on the analysis of data developed in the national workshop series, the issues fall into five interconnected categories.

ISSUE A

Community and agency policy- and decisionmakers need to effectively integrate rural economic, social, and ecological concerns.

- ▶ The Forest Service, as a whole, is not effectively using the methods and approaches of the rural community assistance strategy to support long-term, ongoing collaborative relationships between land managers/owners and rural communities on issues such as land use planning, resource management, community-based stewardship, and community development.
- ▶ Regardless of land ownership patterns, citizens in many rural communities are left out of—or are unable to participate effectively in—ecosystem planning and management, particularly in the management of public lands.
- ▶ Rural citizens in areas near forests and grasslands continue to be frustrated by their inability to influence natural resource decisions and policies that affect their communities.

ISSUE B

Demographic changes are leading to the decoupling of people from a working landscape and causing rapid change in traditional rural culture, skills, lifestyle, and community identity.

- ▶ The Forest Service needs to be a more consistent and active partner in community initiatives and serve as a catalyst for helping rural communities achieve their goals.
- ▶ The Forest Service needs to strengthen its role in research, technology development, technology transfer, product deployment, and related efforts to support the diversification of natural-resource-based economies and to help rural communities compete in local to global markets.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

ISSUE C

Rural communities need sufficient economic infrastructure, including skilled workers, leadership, economic use of by-products, ability to take advantage of opportunities created through the agency's Natural Resource Agenda, and the capacity to build upon their current resources (human, fiscal, environmental, and social).

- ▶ Rural communities need different and competitive economic opportunities.
- ▶ The Forest Service needs to use different management and operating procedures (such as contracting and work planning) and economic action programs on National Forest System lands to support the diversification of forest-resource-based economies.

ISSUE D

The increasing public demand for all uses of natural resources is a significant factor in most conflicts over land uses, natural resource management, and values. Rural places are often caught in the middle without the capacity to participate effectively.

- ▶ The question of continued or discontinued use and management of natural resources as part of sustainable forest management on National Forest System lands is of great concern to rural communities, especially those in close proximity to National Forest System lands.

ISSUE E

Because the Rural Community Assistance (RCA) and Forest Products Conservation and Recycling (FPC&R) efforts have achieved some measure of success, the demand for this type of assistance from the Forest Service continues to grow. The potential exists for expanded use of the programs to achieve collaborative stewardship objectives. Funding levels are insufficient to meet the diverse and expanding needs of the agency and rural communities.

- ▶ The Forest Service needs to do more to demonstrate its success as a Federal agency that is able to help rural communities meet their economic and social objectives within the framework of Federal mandates.
- ▶ The engagement of the Forest Service on rural issues is not strong enough at local community, sub-State, and State levels.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE OF RURAL AMERICA AND THE FOREST SERVICE

The national workshop series identified more than concerns and issues affecting the Forest Service and rural communities. Information was also developed regarding opportunities upon which the agency, its partners, and rural communities could build short- and mid-term actions to achieve long-term outcomes and goals.

OPPORTUNITY A

Build on a growing public understanding of the need for the integration of social, economic, and environmental components of community development and natural resource management.

- ▶ Use working examples and success stories of collaborative stewardship and community development based on Forest Service rural community assistance efforts.
- ▶ Use existing watershed and other stewardship partnerships to work with local and national environmental organizations and others concerned with ecosystem health.
- ▶ Use success stories and increased political awareness of the Rural Community Assistance Programs and EAP's to address issues within the Forest Service (for example, budget process and Natural Resource Agenda implementation), as well as externally.

OPPORTUNITY B

Capitalize on the increased interest of other Federal agencies in rural community assistance and integrated planning processes.

- ▶ Use the increased interest and efforts by Federal and State agencies to participate in local planning to influence marketing, planning, coordination, partnership development, and other activities.
- ▶ Share the "know-how" of the Forest Service's rural community assistance efforts, increase coordination of community-based planning efforts, and reduce duplication among agencies by capitalizing on the increased interest in involving communities in the planning processes for the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State agencies, and others.
- ▶ Use the increased interest and activity in rural community development by the Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, State entities, and others to increase collaboration at various scales.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

OPPORTUNITY C

Respond to the continued increase in demand for Forest Service rural community assistance and technology transfer.

- ▶ Provide technical and financial assistance for sustainable forest and grassland management projects that integrate economic, ecological, and social community concerns – thus working to end the “economy vs. ecology” polarization.
- ▶ Support research and development activities, as well as projects that further new efforts in sustainable forest and grassland management, such as certified carbon credits.

OPPORTUNITY D

Facilitate and encourage partnerships and shared resources and data.

- ▶ For issues that cross the boundaries between public and private forests and grasslands—such as fragmentation, endangered species, and Clean Water Act— involve rural communities, as well as special interest groups and natural resource professionals, by sharing data and resources.
- ▶ Capitalize on the increased role and expertise of nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) in forest and grassland management and rural community development.

2000 AND BEYOND

The Forest Service is committed and positioned to strengthen rural America through forest resources and related natural resources opportunities. By working in partnership with others at all levels of the public and private sectors, we can and do help rural communities develop their capacity to manage change.

Forest Service EAP's facilitate and foster sustainable community development, linking community assistance and resource management in a unique and lasting way. Throughout the country our rural community assistance efforts focus around the themes of healthy communities, appropriately diverse economies, and sustainable ecosystems.

Rural community assistance is at the heart of the Forest Service motto, Caring for the Land and Serving People. The purpose, approach, outcomes, goals, and actions found in this strategic plan are key elements that can both serve and be enhanced by all components of the Forest Service—not only State and Private Forestry, but also the National Forest System and the Research and Development arm of our agency. The community-based, collaborative approach and methods of the Rural Community Assistance Program constitute the glue binding us together as we strive to balance protecting and using the land for the future.

As we begin to implement *Working Together for Rural America: 2000 and Beyond*, we have a big challenge: To truly all work together to achieve quality land management and to meet the diverse needs of people. Successfully implementing this plan will require a dynamic combination of efforts involving employees and leaders at all levels of the Forest Service, along with our many partners.

Key opportunities abound for the future of rural America and the Forest Service. Many are described in this plan. Many more will emerge as we build on our successes and link rural communities more closely with national forest and grassland management and research. Working together, we will care for the land and serve people—an achievement we will share in 2000 and beyond.

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APPENDIX A

CONTEXT AND INTERCONNECTIONS

Historical Forest Service Context

The effort to strengthen the link between the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service and rural communities dates back to the Organic Administration Act of 1897 and its direction to manage forest preserves for water and timber supplies for the Nation. The original purpose of the USDA Bureau of Forestry (established in 1901)—even before the Federal lands were transferred from the Department of the Interior to USDA in 1905—was to link the resources of the Federal Government to needs and opportunities on private and State-owned lands.

The Bureau became the Forest Service with the Transfer Act of 1905. The Weeks Act of 1911 specified cooperation with State foresters. The Weeks Act and its successor, the Cooperative Forestry Act of 1978 (as amended), and language in various appropriations bills guided the Forest Service and related State forester activities outside national forest boundaries for many years. The development and release in 1990 of the Forest Service's national strategic plan for rural development was the first step toward *purposeful* rural development within the agency.

Until the Forest Service joined in the broader USDA effort to take a *Hard Look* (report released in 1989) at the changes needed in rural development, the agency approached rural development as a derivative of land and resource management responsibilities. A *Strategic Plan for the '90s: Working Together for Rural America*, completed in 1990, marked a pivotal change in the Forest Service approach—from rural development as a by-product to providing direct financial, technical, and organizational assistance based on community needs and opportunities for long-term change.

New Authorities, New Programs

The National Forest-Dependent Rural Communities Economic Diversification Act of 1990 significantly enhanced the Forest Service's formal authority to work directly with rural communities in close proximity to national forests. A program was established and funded within the State and Private Forestry budget in 1992 to implement this new authority. Language was established in the fiscal year 1993 budget to allow the use of any Forest Service funds for the purpose of interacting with or pro-

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The flexibility of the community-centered laws, policies, and programs has been praised by many other agencies and organizations.

viding technical assistance to rural communities. This general provision has been retained in all subsequent appropriations acts since 1993. In 1999, the Congress modified the 1990 act to include communities in close proximity to national grasslands.

While the rural development efforts in the Forest Service were evolving, changes also were happening in the arena of Forest Products Utilization and Marketing (U&M) programs. A long-standing component of State and Private Forestry, the U&M program focused on conserving the forest resource through harvesting and processing efficiency and technology transfer. Substantial budget reductions in the 1980's severely reduced the ability of the Forest Service and State foresters to maintain technical expertise and provide technology transfer services. By the end of the 1980's, the Forest Service identified the need to redirect the remaining expertise and refocus the program into an expanded effort—renamed Forest Products Conservation and Recycling (FPC&R). In 1992, a national strategy was introduced to guide this transition to *A New Program for People-Jobs-Environment*.

Collaboration and Partnerships Evolve

As the rural community assistance and forest products conservation and recycling strategies were implemented in the 1990's, many other agencies, individuals, and organizations became more interested in partnership and collaboration, and in working with the Forest Service on community-based and community-driven approaches to sustainable development. The flexibility of the community-centered laws, policies, and programs has been praised by many other agencies and organizations as they have become more familiar with the work and approach of the Forest Service's rural community assistance efforts.

Within the agency, the focus on sustainable development increased the dialogue around the integration of ecological, economic, and social factors. In his November 1994 address titled "Meeting Society's Needs through Forest Products Technology and Marketing," Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas said that "Sustainable ecosystems and sustainable communities...are mutually interdependent." The Forest Service's *Course to the Future* in 1996 called for this integration to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment. "Vital communities" was included as one of three primary outcomes.

According to *Charting our Future...A Nation's Natural Resource Legacy* (Forest Service 1999), a publication that defined the agency-wide Natural Resource Agenda, "Only by forming coalitions among communities, elected officials, conservationists, and industry groups can we address the complexity of achieving sustainability across the landscape." The publication further described the Forest Service's commitment:

"Ensuring sustainable forests requires involvement of communities that benefit from, and care for, these forests. Our efforts to restore healthy forests can help sustain rural communities by providing jobs and recreation opportunities. The Forest Service will work with communities to make sustainable forest ecosystem management real in the lives of those who live and work in them."

Challenges Emerge

The Forest Service is gradually evolving from within to value its role in rural communities, but the agency is very large and the evolution is slow and inconsistent. Employees who have discovered the value of collaborative approaches have learned that it means working together with rural communities—as peers and with respect—to address environmental, social, and economic issues and opportunities that cross ownership boundaries. A lack of understanding at the budget development and staffing levels constitutes a very real threat to the continuation of these efforts.

In 1999, a National Research Initiative-funded study was conducted on the potential role of the Forest Service's Rural Community Assistance (RCA) programs in relationship building between the agency and rural communities near national forests [and grasslands]. The study, *Rural Development and Community-Based Forest Planning and Management: A New, Collaborative Paradigm*, confirms that solid relationships need to be built before progress can be made in collaborative forest and community planning, collaborative stewardship, or community development (Frentz, Burns, Voth, and Sperry 1999). By examining existing projects across the country, many obstacles to building relationships were found. The study also found that the RCA programs,

The Forest Service is gradually evolving from within to value its role in rural communities.

"The re-alignment of community, economy, and ecology in the real lives of people and within actual bioregions is the essential, long-range goal."

"...can support efforts to reconnect rural communities with their national forests [and grasslands] through ecosystem management, stewardship, and partnership development. The RCA program, working collaboratively through an integrated rural development process, can contribute to the emergence of community-based ecosystem sustainability.... A re-alignment of community, economy, and ecology in the real lives of people and within actual bioregions is the essential, long-range goal. The RCA program is already helping rural communities develop their capacities, and collaborate more effectively with their neighboring public land managers."

The report notes in several places that,

"Maximizing RCA program contributions will require greater attention to building deeper connections with the National Forest System of the Forest Service, increasing community capacity, linking with other rural development resources, mobilizing the staff resources of local national forests, and gradually increasing funding over a five year period."

In addition to the study just cited, a Committee of Scientists (COS) commissioned by the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture also issued a report in 1999, which recommended a new framework of planning for national forests and grasslands. The COS report, *Sustaining the People's Lands—Recommendations for Stewardship of the National Forests and Grasslands into the Next Century* (COS 1999), clearly highlights the significance of addressing the issues around sustainability via collaborative processes that more effectively engage and activate communities at all scales.

The action research process used to develop information for this strategy, along with studies such as those referenced above, indicate that the Forest Service still faces challenges in its efforts to work more effectively with rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses and to achieve goals of sustainable development across all ownerships. Other sections of this plan elaborate further on the challenges of community capacity building, Forest Service organizational infrastructure development, and collaborative stewardship.

Programmatic Context

A Federal role exists for the Forest Service to encourage and support the creation and development of financial resources, trained personnel, technical assistance and technology transfer, or other essential community resources in rural places. By assisting rural communities, tribes, and partners, we can work with communities through basic organizing, networking, and strategic planning efforts. This assistance brings in a full range of public and private resources from outside the rural areas to help community-led efforts or to build regional cooperative efforts.

Improved relationships and collaborative strategic planning processes set the stage for more efficient and effective use of all resources as part of long-term solutions for achieving vital communities and healthy ecosystems. With 33,000 employees, most of whom live and work in the thousands of rural communities located in and around the 155 national forests and grasslands, the Forest Service shares many common interests with these communities and is ideally suited to provide a unique and effective form of rural community assistance. This is Federal assistance “with a face” at the local level.

For example, financial and technical assistance in forest products utilization efforts affects market forces on interconnected ecological and economical problems. The components of the Forest Service’s EAP’s are all capable of supporting these types of efforts, each in different but complementary ways. Combined, they are able to provide a wide range of assistance to communities and businesses in the form of financial and technical assistance to support:

- ▶ Outreach to minimum-resource communities
- ▶ Community capacity building
- ▶ Planning
- ▶ Business development and expansion
- ▶ Value-added processing
- ▶ New technology demonstration
- ▶ Cooperative research and development
- ▶ Revolving loan capitalization
- ▶ Funds leveraging
- ▶ Multi-level partnership building

*This is Federal assistance
“with a face” at the local
level.*

Rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses face multiple diverse problems that challenge their ability to effectively deal with change.

The Forest Service's approach to assisting rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses is facilitative, catalytic, community based, inclusive, collaborative, capacity building, flexible, measurable, and accountable.

Needs and Interconnections

Rural communities and natural-resource-based businesses face multiple diverse problems that challenge their ability to effectively deal with change. The rural landscape and its inhabitants are threatened by such diverse conditions as forestry-related business and employment losses, unplanned growth and sprawl, persistent poverty, lack of knowledge or resources to care for the land (public or private), and uncontrollable wildfires.

Rural places depend on natural resources as a base for their social and community assets as well as their overall economic and environmental well-being. For example, in the West, public land management practices have changed, resulting in declines in forest products outputs combined with erratic and unpredictable flows of raw materials. As a consequence, a lack of confidence often precludes investment of capital needed to retool processing plants to enable efficient small timber processing. This results in mill closures and losses in timber-associated industries near public lands. The effect in areas surrounding public forest lands is a decline in the capacity of local communities to provide a skilled workforce for achieving sustainable forest and range management. An increased threat of unsustainable flows of wood products also exists for the Nation's largest forest land ownership category, the historically undermanaged, nonindustrial private forest lands.

Seven general areas of skills are commonly lacking in rural communities that are faced with environmental and other serious challenges:

- ▶ Ability to do strategic planning
- ▶ Ability to resolve conflicting information or data
- ▶ Community leadership and/or community capacity
- ▶ Communications and interagency cooperation
- ▶ Knowledge or understanding of processes
- ▶ Understanding of economic-environmental tradeoffs
- ▶ Community control during implementation

Different scenarios can be written for the challenges facing the rural South, Alaska, communities in the Northeast, the Intermountain West, or the Great Lakes regions. The scenarios should be based on real places and people who need assistance that is tailored and targeted to match their strengths and improve upon their weaknesses. The complexity of the problems and solutions in rural America call for flexible programs and dynamic relationships built upon community-led efforts. Recipients of Forest Service assistance often credit this kind of flexibility and relationship building for making the key difference in their communities' gaining ground toward sustainable development. Other Federal agencies have also expressed an interest in acquiring legal authorities similar to those of the Forest Service to achieve a greater level of flexibility and responsiveness to local rural needs and opportunities.

The quality of life and the economies of rural and urban communities are linked, yet no conventional mechanisms appear to facilitate working together toward a sustainable future. Rural communities find it especially difficult to compete for financial and technical resources and often lack staffing or other tools necessary to set and achieve long-term strategic goals even though strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation are essential to sustainable community development. Often, tribal and minority communities have an even harder time getting access to resources necessary for building capacity to address economic, social, or environmental concerns. The vitality and well-being of rural places are inextricably interconnected with the health of the land, at all scales. The threats to the sustainability of rural America, therefore, are direct threats to the sustainability of the diverse ecosystems under both public and private ownership.

Many of issues and opportunities surfaced in the action research workshops are directly related to one or more of these seven skill areas.

The vitality and well-being of rural places are inextricably interconnected with the health of the land, at all scales.

Appendix A References

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APPENDIX B

ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Umbrella statements, or goals, were developed at the consolidation workshop (Alvarez and Diemer 1999) as a way of identifying critical and unique issues to be addressed by the Forest Service's Economic Action Programs (EAP's). The goals were meant to help determine the Forest Service role in community-based natural resource use and management and in community socio-economic and ecological processes.

Workshop participants consolidated the goals into groups, separating items that require action planning from descriptions of program purpose and approach. Action plan groupings were based on priority ranking and on similarity or overlap. The following were identified as consolidated action planning elements:

- ▶ Research and Technology Transfer
- ▶ Internal Support
- ▶ Program Management and Accountability
- ▶ External Support
- ▶ Previously Underserved Communities
- ▶ Collaboration and Partnerships
- ▶ Training and Education

Each of these elements became the basis of an action plan, nested in time and described with as much specificity as possible. Participants were asked to describe the specific deeds that should take place to accomplish the action, including the date the action begins, the activities that will take place, the measurable outcome of the activities, and the expected date of completion.

The resulting action statements are outlined earlier in this document. The complete Implementation Plan includes the statements and their related actions, activities, outcomes, and due dates. The Implementation Plan will be updated annually to show progress and to include new ideas and actions for achieving the outcomes and goals of the strategic plan. Updates will be posted to the following website:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/eap>.

Definitions – as used in the consolidation workshop

Action—An act that one consciously wills and that may be characterized by physical or mental activity; something that demands actions instead of debate.

Activity—A specific deed, action, or function (such as developing an instrument to measure something, collecting statistics, or conducting a literature review).

The following goals or umbrella statements were developed during the consolidation workshop:

- A. EAP's help communities to better use their natural resources to improve local economies through providing product, processing, marketing, research, development, and technology transfer.
- B. The Forest Service is fully committed to EAP's community-based approaches and methods as an integral component of achieving ecosystem health and rural community vitality.
- C. EAP's have decentralized and flexible management with flexible project eligibility.
- D. EAP's funding is linked to accountability and measurable outcomes that are of value to communities.
- E. Communities plan with an understanding of sustainable forest management and have the capacity to increase natural-resource-based and other community development opportunities.
- F. Key stakeholders and political decisionmakers recognize the result (value) of the EAP's and are committed financially and philosophically to long-term support.
- G. The National Forest System program of work fully integrates and involves local sustainable community development efforts.
- H. EAP's are well understood and used within the Forest Service and in local communities. EAP's are also understood and used at the State and Federal executive and legislative levels.
- I. Formerly underserved and distressed communities are fully informed and involved.
- J. EAP's support rural community-based initiatives to promote economic vitality and opportunity. EAP's are fundamentally a community-based program.
- K. EAP's continue to be appropriately funded to provide unique, flexible, financial (for example, gap funding), and technical support that helps communities to build capacity to identify issues and to solve problems in response to locally developed plans.
- L. EAP's use collaboration, coordination, and partnerships to maximize effective and efficient accomplishment of community goals.
- M. The Forest Service has permanent full-time, knowledgeable, well-trained EAP's coordinators, depending on workload and community needs.

- N. EAP's provide more leadership training and educational programs to community leaders, development specialists, State and local government officials, and industry leaders to improve their capacity to develop sustainable natural-resource-based strategies and improve the quality of life in both rural and urban areas.

The following table illustrates the connections among the strategic plan outcomes presented in "Part A–Integrating Natural Resource Management and Rural Community Assistance," the action plans presented in the Implementation Plan, and the original goals or umbrella statements developed during the consolidation workshop.

Strategic Plan Outcomes		Action Plans	
Outcome	Relates to Action Plan(s)	Action Plan	Relates to Consolidated Workshop Goal(s)
I. Rural communities with capacity to manage change	1, 4, 5, 7	1. Research and technology transfer	A
II. Sustainable resource management via collaborative stewardship	1, 2, 5	2. Internal support	B, G, J, M
III. Appropriately diverse economies	1, 5, 6, 7	3. Program management and accountability	C, D, K
IV. Effective Forest Service Institutional Infrastructure	2, 3, 4, 6, 7	4. External support and education and information sharing	E, F, H
V. Effective communication and outreach	2, 5, 6, 7	5. Reaching previously underserved communities	I
		6. Collaboration and partnership	L
		7. Training and education	N

Appendix B References

Alvarez, R. C.; and Diemer, J. A. 1999. USDA-Forest Service national economic action program 2002 and beyond: consolidation workshop report. Las Cruces, New Mexico: International Institute for Resources Management (IIRM), College of Agriculture and Home Economics, New Mexico State University.

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Over 250 **workshop participants** contributed significant personal and professional knowledge and expertise to produce and analyze useful and current information for the policy makers, program managers, and beneficiaries of the Forest Service’s EAP’s. Sincere appreciation is offered to each and every person who so willingly gave of his or her time and so thoughtfully provided data and information for use in the strategic planning process.

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